



MEETING MINUTES – Merced GSP Stakeholder Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting

DATE/TIME: March 21, 2022, 1:00 to 3:00 PM

LOCATION: Hybrid meeting with physical location at Merced Irrigation District, Franklin Yard Facility, 3321 North Franklin Road, Merced, CA 95348 and online via Zoom

Stakeholder Committee Members in Attendance:

	Representative	Community Aspect Representation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arlan Thomas	MIDAC member
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ben Migliazzo (alternate)	MIDAC member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bob Kelley	Stevinson Representative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blake Nervino	Stevinson/Merquin
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Breanne Ramos	MCFB
<input type="checkbox"/>	Craig Arnold	Arnold Farms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Darren Olguin	Resident of Merced County
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dave Serrano	Serrano Farms - Le Grand
<input type="checkbox"/>	David Belt	Foster Farms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emma Reyes	Martin Reyes Farm/Land Leveling
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greg Olzack	Atwater Resident
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jean Okuye	E Merced RCD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Joe Sansoni	Sansoni Farms/MCFB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Joe Scoto	Scoto Brothers/McSwain School Dist.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jose Moran	Livingston City Council
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lacy Carothers	Cal Am Water
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lisa Baker	Clayton Water District
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lisa Kayser-Grant	Sierra Club
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mark Maxwell	UC Merced
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Maxwell Norton	Unincorporated area
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nav Athwal	TriNut Farms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Olivia Gomez	Community of Planada
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nataly Escobedo Garcia (alternate)	Leadership Counsel
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parry Klassen	ESJWQC
<input type="checkbox"/>	Darcy Brown	River Partners
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rick Drayer	Merced/Mariposa Cattlemen
<input type="checkbox"/>	Robert Weimer	Weimer Farms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Simon Vander Woude	Sandy Mush MWC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Susan Walsh	City of Merced
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bill Spriggs (alternate)	Merced resident
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Thomas Dinwoodie	Master Gardener/McSwain
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trevor Hutton	Valley Land Alliance
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wes Myers	Merced Grassland Coalition
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lou Myers (alternate)	Benjamin Land LP

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order and Welcome
 - a. Charles Gardiner (Catalyst) welcomed the group.
2. Introductions and Roll Call
 - a. Charles Gardiner (Catalyst) reviewed the agenda and meeting guidelines, conducted roll call, and reminded attendees that past meeting materials are available online at mercedsgma.org. Attendees were also reminded that we're planning to meet again in April, May, and June.
3. Grants Updates
 - a. SGM Implementation Planning and Projects Grant Update
 - i. Jim Blanke (Woodard & Curran [W&C]) described the completed grant application and shared that DWR has recently approved the \$7.6 million of requested project funding.
 - ii. Q: How soon will grant agreements be in place? A: Likely a few months.
 - b. Prop 68 Round 3 Planning
 - i. Lacey McBride (MSGSA) shared that staff-level conversations have been occurring on the second phase of the Data Gaps Plan to fund 2 shallow or 1 deep well, plus some other activities to incorporate existing wells. Surrounding subbasins are also using Technical Support Services funding available from DWR and the Merced GSAs plan to make use of this funding as well. There's a running list of wells to be considered and conversations are continuing.
 - ii. Jim Blanke (W&C) shared that the Remote Sensing Decision Support Tool is ongoing, largely based on what kind of data is available. Time has been spent looking for accurate and cost-effective data. OpenET has been the latest focus, but the data is not quite available yet, though a preliminary copy has been obtained for initial review.
 1. The Committee discussed CIMIS stations vs meters vs remote sensing.
 2. Madeline Harris (Leadership Counsel) provided comments and asked a question:
 - a. Leadership Counsel has doubts about accuracy of remotely sensed evapotranspiration (ET) data. Strongly recommends basinwide metering. ET is OK to use as validation, but not primary source of measurement.
 - b. Q: What is the timeline for the GSAs to start measuring GW use? A: Waiting for OpenET dataset finalization in next few months. Tool will be wrapped up by October 2022.
 - c. 2020 SGM Implementation Grant
 - i. Matt Beaman (Merced Irrigation District [MID]) shared the latest information on the two funded projects, both of which are in progress and on track (Le Grand-Athlone Water District [LGAWD] Intertie and Recharge Project & El Nido Conveyance System Improvements).
 - ii. Comment (Dave Serrano) : Complications with LGAWD project. At a meeting held last Thursday, the Proposition 218 election was discussed which is coming up at end of March 2022. There is a land classification issue that has been noted where some parcels aren't registered in the right land use category.
 - d. SDAC Grant





- i. Matt Beaman (MID) provided an update on a 2019 grant agreement covering three projects serving underrepresented communities.
 1. Q: What is the result/action coming out of the Meadowbrook Study? A: The study does not prescribe any particular recommendation option.
 2. Q: Based on the Meadowbrook Study, what about wastewater treatment for agriculture or recharge? A: Hasn't been talked about yet. Lacey Carothers (Cal Am) shared that she's interested in talking about it more offline.
 3. Q (Susan Walsh): Is the plan for Planada now to put in dry wells instead of a recharge basin? A: Yes. Matt Beaman provided some more technical information about the results of the recharge tests done at the site and the follow-up decision-making.
 4. Q (Susan Walsh): For LGAWD, would City of Atwater or City of Merced need to vote? Are there potential political complications? A: MID is not one of those agencies, but shared that the intent of the study was to assess feasibility of intertie connection(s) for emergency and drought purposes. The grant funding only covered the feasibility study.

4. Water Year 2021 Annual Report

- a. Chris Hewes (W&C) provided key highlights from the recently drafted WY 2021 Annual Report that will be submitted to DWR by April 1.
 - i. Comment (Arlan Thomas): The sub-Corcoran subsidence area has always been a problem.
 1. Response: Yes, it may always have been a problem, but the question here is if it is better or worse than last year.
 - ii. Q: What are the estimated data points on the groundwater level change maps? A: These represent where Fall 2020, Fall 2021, or both were not recorded (or had a quality control issue noted), and an estimate was made based on historical and surrounding trends. It is anticipated that future mapping will require fewer estimates with better data collection.
 - iii. Q: Does DWR read and provide comments on the annual report? A: The reports are available for public comment on the SGMA data portal, but typically haven't received comments from public or DWR.
 - iv. Q: Will the Annual Report be on the website? Can it be emailed to the Committee? A: Yes, it will be published to Merced SGMA website and SGMA portal website. W&C will email a copy to the Committee once published.

5. Sustainable Management Criteria refresher

- a. Jim Blanke (W&C) walked the Committee through a description of the SGMA terminology for sustainable management criteria, including minimum thresholds, undesirable results, measurable objectives, etc.

6. Comments on Groundwater Sustainability Plan by the Department of Water Resources

- a. DWR comments overview
 - i. Jim Blanke (W&C) reviewed the three comments from DWR on the GSP which was determined "incomplete".
- b. Groundwater levels

- i. Jim Blanke (W&C) walked through some options that are being evaluated for different minimum thresholds, including (1) 2015 levels, (2) historical low, or (3) deeper of historical low or shallowest domestic well + 10 ft. He also described the pros and cons (challenges) of each potential option. It's challenging to know what DWR will accept. It's likely that all options are workable. There is more risk of disapproval by DWR with options 2 and 3, but they are harder to achieve.
- ii. Comment (Arlan Thomas): 2015 groundwater levels are not achievable, even with several flood years.
- iii. Public comment: "ET is incomplete, because it only measures evapo-transpiration, but would not measure water being sold out of area. ET also does not account for the water moving in the opposite direction, from soil to ground water because of plants. Cover-cropping, riparian buffers (native plants and trees bordering waterways), and trees all promote increased soil moisture, decrease rain water runoff and help carry water to the ground aquifers. Habitat restoration, and keeping cover crops on ag land (no bare soil) are necessary to restore water retention in both our soils and groundwater. This does not solve the abuse of the past decades but these practices do begin to address the issues we face with predicted, more severe and further spaced severe weather events such as droughts and precipitation."
- iv. Q: When will you have extraction rates associated with each option? A: Next SAC meeting in April.
- v. Q: Do we know what's happening in other areas of the Valley for these kinds of GSP comments? Are the methodologies similar or different for other basins? Can you give a quick rundown of how GSPs have been kicked back? A: North & South Yuba Subbasins and a few coastal aquifers have been approved but rest are not. The DWR comments have varied for other Central Valley GSPs. There is some level of coordination occurring between basins, but limited due to short timeframe to respond. Some interbasin coordination is occurring with subsidence.
- vi. Q (Madeline Harris from Leadership Counsel): With the different options, such as #3 – is shallowest domestic well based on data available in 2015? Want the most protective option for drinking water. A: Updated domestic well data comes from the County and runs through December 2021.
- vii. Q: When you get a permit to drill a well in Merced County, is other information recorded other than the construction depth? A: Information on the pump setting or water level after the well was constructed are not available in the permit record.
- viii. Jim Blanke (W&C) provided an update on the domestic well analysis and other technical components related to the minimum threshold analysis. He also shared some options for managing Undesirable Results for groundwater levels and asked the SAC for their input on whether these are the right management considerations. Various questions and comments included:
 1. Q: Are there are areas where pumping levels aren't declining at the same rate? A: Likely yes, such as near rivers.
 2. A SAC member who is also a ranch owner shared that their ranch's Above Corcoran wells don't have much year-to-year variation in levels while Below Corcoran wells do have noticeable declines.
 3. This all seems to boil down to the need to reduce pumping and use more surface water.
 4. Group agreed that pumping reductions have to start ASAP with a sloping ramp down.



5. We may not ultimately know how much total pumping reduction is required until incremental reductions have been occurring for some time, like 10 years, and observations through time inform what the ultimate total should be.
6. If we make recharge projects viable, that mitigates a lot of the groundwater pumping reductions.
7. Waiting until 2040 is not an option.
8. 2024-2027 is too short of a time period for reduction implementations. Needs to be minimum 5 years of a ramping as long as it can be done without undesirable results.
 - a. Others thought 5-year check-ins would be ideal over a 10 year ramp-down period.
 - b. Ideal to get some results by 2035 for last GSP update before 2040.
 - c. **The Stakeholder Advisory Committee recommended faster cuts to hit goal by 2035 to be able to evaluate results before the Basin arrives at 2040.**
9. Bay Area legislator is suggesting speeding up of SGMA implementation.
10. Recharge projects should be sooner than later and more the better.
11. Implementation of reductions in response to drought years – open to opportunities, but unsure how to evaluate against that given the number of variables.
12. Q: Have you looked at Madera for their ramp-down? A: A little, but not in great detail.

c. Subsidence

- i. Jim Blanke (W&C) shared information about the subsidence comment from DWR and some context for subsidence in the basin.
- ii. The group discussed about delayed subsidence occurring even after pumping reductions.
- iii. Comment: There is a hazard of setting the subsidence goal at 0 ft/yr: risk to have the SWRCB come in and take over control of the subbasin.
- iv. Q: Can the geographic discussion be brought into subsidence as well as for groundwater levels? And are there considerations for interbasin issues? A: Probably can't have a differing geographic area for minimum thresholds for subsidence, but SGMA does indicate that neighboring subbasins can't interfere with our ability to meet our sustainability goals.

d. Schedule

- i. Jim Blanke (W&C) described the schedule for incorporating edits into the GSP by end of July to address DWR's comments.
- ii. In April, W&C will be presenting some updated potential pumping reduction numbers to meet the different minimum threshold levels.
- iii. A request was made to focus on the topic of pumping reductions and not additional topics at the April SAC meeting.

7. GSA Reports

- a. Lacey McBride provided an update for the Merced Subbasin GSA:
 - i. A land repurposing program is being developed (short-term 3-5 years) to achieve phase 1 goal that will be funded through a Proposition 218 effort. Public workshops will be coming up in the next several weeks.
 - ii. MSGSA is looking to apply for Department of Conservation long-term 10+ year land repurposing funding.



- iii. Lacey also provided an update on the well consistency policy that is being developed by the GSA.
 - b. Matt Beaman provided an update for the Merced Irrigation-Urban GSA: the MIUGSA stakeholder guidance committee met four times and has made recommendations for implementation of an allocation program, with a 1.1 AFY/ac that is averaged over a 3-year period, so that MIUGSA would allocated 3.3 AF/AC to be used over a 3 year allocation period.
 - c. Kel Mitchel did not have an update for the Turner Island Water District GSA #1.
 - d. SAC discussion
 - i. Q (Joe Scoto): Has there been any interest in voluntary land repurposing? A (Lacey McBride): While the Nov 2021 survey response was low, what was heard was that there was more interest in short-term programs for a portion of any individual parcel, which will also depend on the incentive provided by the GSA.
- 8. Public Comment
 - a. None.
- 9. Next steps and adjourn
 - a. Lacey McBride requested that the Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting should be scheduled to occur before the Coordination Committee.
 - b. Meeting was adjourned at 3:17pm.

Next Regular Meeting

TBD in late April 2022

Meeting to be conducted hybrid (physical + virtual; subject to change)

Information also available online at mercedsgma.org